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Weekly Summary

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MEXICO: RURAL DISCONTENT

Guerrilla violence and signs of rural discontent are once again plaguing the Echeverria government.

The strange case of the political boss of the southwestern state of Guerrero, Senator Ruben Figueroa, kidnaped two weeks ago by guerrilla leader Lucio Cabanas, remains unresolved. Cabanas operates in Guerrero and receives considerable support from the peasants there. Figueroa, the government's choice for state governor in elections this December, went to a meeting he had proposed with Cabanas to offer him amnesty and wound up Cabanas' prisoner. [redacted] Authorities are doubtless searching for a way to free Figueroa unharmed and to capture or kill the troublesome Cabanas at the same time. The government's stated policy is not to give in to kidnapers' demands [redacted]

[redacted]

Compounding the Figueroa problem was the kidnaping last week of a wealthy Mexican businessman and the murder of a student leader in Guadalajara. The businessman died while in captivity, apparently of a heart attack, but his abduction brought to light what could be a new guerrilla group called the Salvador Allende Urban Command. [redacted] The student's death adds to the tension in Guadalajara, the scene of many acts of violence in the past several months.

Publicly, the government still lumps the guerrillas together with common criminals. [redacted]

Many in the government also recognize that, in the end, the grievances of the guerrillas will only be resolved by correcting social and economic inequities. [redacted] In April, 32 campesinos and police were killed in two incidents arising from the use of farm land. These confrontations do not always end in shootouts—sometimes politicians save the situation with fresh promises—but bloodshed on the *campo* is not uncommon.

The unrest is partly a result of corruption and exploitation, but ignorance, population pressures, a shortage of good land, and the concentration on industry during the last 30 years also play

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a part, as do the rising expectations of the peasants. President Echeverria has in some ways heightened these expectations. He came to office in 1970 promising to improve the lot of the peasantry, a commitment he frequently renews during trips to the countryside. He has already made more trips to the provinces than his three predecessors did during their collective 18 years in office, but the peasants have seen little results from these journeys.

Probably the chief factor responsible for the unrest, however, is the government's agrarian policy, with its system of *ejido* farms. The *ejido*, a variant of the ancient Indian communal lands, satisfied the urgent political need to give land to millions of impoverished peasants. But it has failed to meet the food needs of the country or the economic needs of the peasants themselves. The Echeverria administration intends to ease the problem of sluggish growth in agricultural production in part by collectivizing more *ejidos* and by providing them with increased public and private credit. The small landowner will not be forgotten—he too is included in plans for increased lending—but the emphasis will be on collectives and agribusiness. [redacted]

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